

Implementation Program

Constructing and managing the MST-East will require a unique partnership effort among public and private sector interests. This chapter of the conceptual plan offers recommendations for establishing a multi-jurisdictional framework and an approach for undertaking future implementation of the MST-East. In order for implementation to be successful, six inter-related steps are necessary:

- leadership
- cooperation
- decisive action
- funding
- construction
- trail dedication

Building a 246-mile land and water based trail is an ambitious and complicated undertaking. It will take time to acquire the land, and/or the public rights-of-way, along the entire corridor. Funds must be raised to build trail facilities, and operation and management agreements will have to be developed and executed in order to maintain the public trail corridor.

History has shown that it took more than two decades to assemble and open for public use the 300+ miles of the MST corridor in the west of North Carolina. A strong desire and spirit of cooperation is emerging to accomplish the same in the east, within a much shorter timeframe.

The preferred method for securing access and use rights along the corridor is through either fee-simple acquisition - where all rights associated with a property are transferred to a new owner - or through the acquisition of a perpetual easement - where certain rights are permanently transferred but the owner maintains possession of the land itself. There is much more information about these options in Appendix B. The many acquisition options that are listed there should all be considered potential tools for protecting the eastern corridor, but permanent ownership of the property or perpetual easements are the preferred strategies.

A MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL APPROACH

Adoption of a multi-jurisdictional approach to implementing the MST-East project is the first step towards implementation. This approach will require strong leadership on the part of the State of North Carolina and a new spirit of cooperation between the State and local governments throughout the corridor and among the local governments themselves. Additionally, this approach will require the involvement and integration of private sector interests in the future planning, design, implementation and operation of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

The State Trails Program must be empowered and strengthened in order to continue serving its role as catalyst, facilitator and champion of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. In this role, the State Trails Program, and specifically the State Trails Coordinator, will need to continue facilitation of the partnership program that was begun in preparation of this plan. Regular meetings of the partnership should continue to take place, with the agenda shifting from planning to project implementation and fund raising.

Local governments, including counties, cities, and towns along the



corridor, need to understand the many benefits that will be derived from having a portion of the MST corridor extending through their respective jurisdictions. Local governments will become the lead developer for most of the segments along the corridor. As such, they will work closely with State Trails Program staff to raise funds, construct trail segments, and establish operation and management programs for each segment. The resource burden, financial and otherwise, for accomplishing this will not be borne solely by local governments. State, Federal, and private interests will play a major role in offering technical assistance and financial aid. The local governments, however, will serve of the overall coordinator of the efforts necessary for the development of each segment.

The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail will need to expand its membership and influence in this area of the state and become a primary partner with local governments in developing future segments of the MST. The Friends should put themselves in a position to assist local governments with funding, design, construction and operation of the future trail.

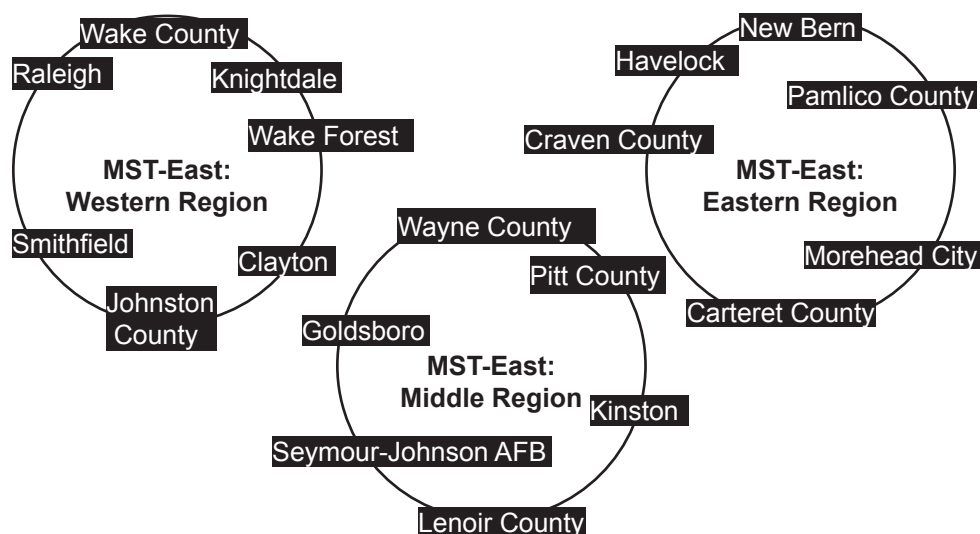
Private land trusts, such as the Triangle Land Conservancy and the NC Coastal Land Trust, will play a key role in working with both the State and local governments to secure the right-of-ways necessary to develop all the trail segments. These organizations can also play a critical role in developing long-term management strategies that best blend use and protection of individual properties along the corridor.

Private businesses within each community along the route will play a vital role in the future development of each trail segment. Again, history has shown that tremendous opportunities exist for new business start-ups and economic development related to long-

distance trails. In rural Iowa, the 60+ mile Iowa Heritage Trail has enabled farm families to diversify and expand economic activity beyond traditional agricultural operations. For example, some feed and seed supply stores now double as rest stops and convenience stores for trail users, generating significant income that extends throughout the year. There is money to be made from the future development of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, and as more of the trail is opened for business, more business opportunities will emerge.

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The organizational framework that is recommended groups the counties and municipalities together within a geographic region, optimizing future trail development, funding and management activities. A graphic model of this framework is illustrated below:



Through this recommended organizational framework, the counties and municipalities would work cooperatively with the State Trails Program, private sector partners, and volunteer organizations to acquire land rights or to fund, develop and manage segments of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

State Government Action Steps

The State of North Carolina must provide a substantial leadership role in the future development of the MST-East. The paragraphs below describe key implementation steps that must be undertaken by the State in order to realize full development of the trail.

Step 1: Commit resources of state agencies and define cooperative work program to ensure success of project. The State should commit resources from DENR’s Division of Parks and Recreation, DOT’s Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation and the Department of Commerce to work cooperatively on a short-term and long-term strategy for implementing the MST-East. To that end, a multi-agency task force should be established consisting of leaders from these agencies. They should meet on a regular basis and define a program for monitoring land acquisition and future trail facility development. Plans should be formulated for utilizing matching grant funds, and methods should be established for communicating with local governments and with trail advocates to ensure the success of the project.

“A multi-agency task force should be established”

Step 2: Provide technical assistance and guidance to local governments and organizations in order to realize full development of MST-East. The State Trails Program should continue to provide support in the form of technical assistance to local governments and trail advocates throughout the project corridor. State Trails staff in the eastern portions of North Carolina should make future development of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail a high priority, and continue to work with local governments to ensure future implementation.

Step 3: Expand the State Park System as appropriate through acquisition of land along Neuse River. Establishing a new or expanded state park that is part of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail can provide many benefits to the residents and to the economy of eastern North Carolina. Based on findings from the NC Division of State Parks’ new report, “New Parks for a New Century”, and the findings of this concept plan, It is recommended that the State should continue to pursue creation of the Middle Neuse River State Park in Southeast Johnson County and Wayne County.

Each of the private sector and public sector partners will be expected to do their part in acquiring land rights, building trails, and managing resources and facilities. However, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources should be prepared to make additional investments in land acquisition along the corridor in cases where local level partners are not able to meet the responsibilities laid out for them in this document.

Step 4: Continue planning for other sections
State Parks should make the next planning step by beginning a similar process to this one for the MST-Piedmont. This process should also culminate in a planning document that details trail



alignment, trail head locations, funding needs, and implementation strategies.

Local Government Action Steps

Local governments include the counties and municipalities that lie directly along or immediately adjacent to the route of the MST-East. These local governments will benefit from the future development of the trail and will also be vested with a substantial amount of responsibility for securing land, and developing and managing future trail segments. In order to accomplish these objectives, local governments should follow the steps listed below.

“The State should continue to pursue the creation of the Middle Neuse River State Park”

Step 1: Incorporate MST-East routing and alignment objectives into Park and Recreation and Comprehensive Plans for your community. Each local government along the trail route should adopt and incorporate this trail alignment as part of their comprehensive, growth management, or park and recreation plans. This will ensure that necessary land and water resources are appropriately reserved for the trail and that future land use activities take into account MST facility development. Adoption and incorporation of the plan recommendations also creates both the legal and financial basis for local governments to pursue future trail development and will make local governments eligible for matching state funding.

Within any resolution of support for this plan, local governments should stress the commitment to assist with land acquisition and funding for future trail development and their commitment to manage the resource in perpetuity.

Step 2: Commit matching funds to MST segments and apply for State funding. In order to construct segments of the MST-East, local governments that lie along the route are asked to appropriate funds for future construction, maintenance, and operation costs. Local funds that are appropriated can be used to leverage state and federal matching funds for future trail construction. Communities that do not appropriate funds may not be eligible for state and federal assistance. Appropriations can come from the budgets of local governments and/or can be generated from the private sector. Each local government should be responsible for managing local funds used as a match for future construction and management of the trail.

Step 3: Acquire land for future trail development. Local governments will need to work with land trusts and the State of North Carolina to complete the acquisition of the needed land rights to facilitate unpaved and paved land-based trails, and access areas for paddle trailheads. Appendix B of this report outlines a variety of land acquisition strategies that can be used both by landowners and by the local or state government agencies interested in securing right-of-way for the MST-East trail.

“Each local government along the trail route should adopt and incorporate this trail alignment as part of their comprehensive, growth management, or park and recreation plans”



Land trusts can be extremely helpful in conducting negotiations with property owners and assisting local governments with land acquisition. Land trusts will need financial contributions to employ staff and pursue negotiations with landowners.

Step 4: Complete detailed design and engineering work for segments that are located within jurisdiction. After land or right-of-way has been secured, design for individual trail segments can commence. Future design and engineering of multi-use paved trail segments or paddle trail access facilities will need to occur through the supervision and direction of local governments. Unpaved natural surface trail segments can be accomplished by volunteer efforts supervised by the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. The State Trails Division staff can also be consulted for technical advice. The costs for design and engineering services can be paid from one or more of the following sources: local government budgets, private sector resources or state and federal grants. Local governments should employ licensed landscape architects and engineers with a demonstrated experience in greenway or multi-use trail development.

“Local governments that lie along the route are asked to appropriate funds for future construction, maintenance, and operation costs.”

Step 5: Oversee the construction of each funded segment. Once a segment of multi-use paved trail or paddle trail access facility has been designed and engineered, local governments will need to oversee construction. Such construction administration services can be contracted to qualified landscape architectural or engineering firms. These services can also be provided from within local governments through park and

recreation or public works departments.

Step 6: Agree to maintain and manage each completed segment, either in partnership with other local groups, or as part of institutional framework. With the completion of each trail segment, a maintenance and management plan should be developed and implemented. Local governments will want to partner with private sector organizations, including the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail Task Force to manage unpaved or natural surface hiking trails. In most cases, these trail segments can be managed by volunteers with minimal local government assistance.

Paved, multi-use trails and paddle access trail facilities will most likely require the attention of local governments. Maintenance programs for these facilities can be incorporated into the current operations of parks and recreation or public works departments. Additional technical assistance should be sought for the stewardship of the natural resources and habitat areas along the MST-East Corridor.

MST Advocate Action Steps

Advocates of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail can include individuals, trail organizations, civic groups, land trusts, businesses and other private sector for-profit and non-profit groups that support the future development of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. The following is a recommended step-by-step approach for how these groups can transform advocacy into action.

Step 1A: Join a Regional Group. One of the best ways for individuals and organizations to support the future development



of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail would be to join the Regional MST planning group for their area. These are the same groups that have come together to give input to this Conceptual Plan. The groups will meet on a regular basis to discuss the future design, implementation and management of trail segments within each Region of the MST-East.

Step 1B: Join FMST and participate in activities. In addition to joining the Regional group, individuals and organizations should also join the Friends organization that supports the entire 900-mile project. To learn more about Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail visit their web site at www.ncmst.org.

Step 2: Ask local government to adopt the recommendations of the Conceptual Plan. Local organizations and individuals should also approach elected officials within each county and municipality in which the MST-East route traverses and request that the recommendations of this plan be incorporated and adopted as part of the comprehensive parks and recreation and land use plans. Adoption is an important step for creating the legal and financial basis for future land acquisition and trail facility development.

Step 3: Obtain financial commitment from the local government to complete Conceptual Plan objectives. The private sector will need to work closely with local governments to ensure that the objectives of this plan are implemented. Critical to future implementation is a financial commitment to the MST-East. State funding can be leveraged in support of local trail segments, however, local governments must generate matching dollars, both for facility construction and operation. Individuals, non-profits and local businesses can assist local governments in

generating matching funds. Direct contributions to a local fund and support for the use of local government budgets to develop the trail are two ways to demonstrate your commitment and to facilitate commitment from your local government.

“Join the regional MST planning group for the area.”

Step 4: Assist local governments with application for State funding. The private

sector can also assist local governments in obtaining state and federal grant funds by helping local governments apply for these funds. In some cases, applications require written letters of support, photos or research. Some local governments will require the assistance of able grant writers. Individuals and supporters of the MST-East should do what they can to provide assistance in obtaining these grant dollars.

Step 5: Coordinate efforts with local governments, FMST and State Trails Division. Private sector interests can also work with local and state governments to coordinate efforts and keep project segments moving toward completion. It may be necessary at times for private sector groups to serve as a go-between for local and state governments on certain segments of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

Step 6: Assist local governments and state of NC with acquisition of priority lands defined within the Plan. One of the most valuable services that private sector groups and individuals can offer is in the area of land acquisition. Non-profit land trusts are particularly important in this area of work and can be of great assistance to local and state governments in the area of land acquisition. Land trusts, however, need financial support in



order to provide these services. They use this support to employ staff and implement work programs. Contributions to a land trust can come from both local and state governments as well as from private sector organizations or individuals.

“Additional technical assistance should be sought for the stewardship of the natural resources and habitat areas along the MST-East corridor.”

Step 7: Assist the local government with construction of trail segments and other facilities defined in your community or Region.

For unpaved, natural trail segments, private

sector organizations and individuals can provide assistance in trail construction. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is experienced in building natural surface hiking trails and can assume a lead role in constructing MST-East hiking trail segments that are not sponsored by local governments. Paved, multi-use trails will most likely be constructed by local governments.

Step 8: Agree to assist local governments with maintenance and management of completed segments and facilities.

Private sector groups, individuals, and businesses should agree to help manage, maintain, and operate completed segments of the MST-East Trail. Completed segments can be officially adopted, either through the State Trails Adopt-a-Trail program or from similar local programs. Local groups should select miles of completed trail to adopt and contact local governments to formally assume maintenance responsibilities.

Funding Strategy

Local governments, private non-profit organizations, land trust organizations, and volunteers should consider applying for available State and Federal grants to assist with the acquisition, development and management of the MST. Of course in some circumstances, individual entities may act alone. For example, a land trust may choose to buy a portion of the corridor from its own members' contributions. An individual county, municipality, or state agency may decide on its own to acquire property along the corridor for its own program purposes. In any case, securing State and Federal funds will be an essential part of this plan. The State and Federal trust funds and grant programs that might be tapped as future funding sources for land acquisition and trail development for the MST include:

- Clean Water Management Trust Fund
- Natural Heritage Trust Fund
- Parks and Recreation Trust Fund
- Farmland Preservation Trust Fund
- Forest Legacy Program Funds
- Environmental Enhancement Program
- Federal TEA3 – Enhancement Funds
- DOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Program Grants
- Recreational Trails Program Grants
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- State Adopt-A-Trail Grants

“Local governments should generate matching dollars for acquisition, facility construction and operations”

Over the course of time, the State of North Carolina and its



partners will encounter a variety of issues that are important to the successful management and operation of the trail. The following operational policies are defined to assist these partners in responding to typical trail implementation issues. More specific problems and issues may arise during the long-term development of the system that result in additional policies being considered and adopted. Additional information about long-term management can be found in Appendix C: Facility Management.

“Private sector groups, individuals, and businesses should agree to help manage, maintain, and operate completed segments of the MST-East Trail.”

